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# Questions About Waldheim

By Robert E. Herzstein

COLUMBIA, S.C. — Four weeks ago, officials of the World Jewish Congress retained me as a paid consultant to do research on the wartime career of Kurt Waldheim, the former Secretary General of the United Nations. I flew to Washington to work in the collection of captured German records stored in the National Archives, and completed my assignment in 11 days.

In that relatively brief time, I found, among other things, that Mr. Waldheim had been an important intelligence officer in Army Group E, a German Army group of 300,000 men based in and around Salonika, Greece, and had been responsible for security in the southern Balkan region. He was charged with very sensitive tasks, among them the organization of intelligence procured by German interrogators from Greek and Yugoslav prisoners.

Mr. Waldheim (then a first lieutenant) was also responsible for "special tasks," a euphemism for sensitive and distasteful unwritten orders that were not to be attributed to the German Army. Officers in his department had to be politically reliable and were expected to work with relevant SS and Gestapo authorities. The trail grows cold after Dec. 31, 1944. But that is often the case when one examines German Army records.

Three crucial questions must be answered: First, if I found all this in little over a week, what did I fail to discover? What lies in the military archives in Freiburg, West Germany, and in Yugoslav judicial and archival collections? Second, how is it that this information did not surface 10, 20 or

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35 years ago? Third, did Western governments and their intelligence agencies conclude that Mr. Waldheim's marketable postwar skills as an intelligence analyst outweigh his wartime activities?

More archival research will answer the first question. The second and third questions are new ones — and potentially more explosive in their implications.

Mr. Waldheim appeared on a 1948 American list of alleged war criminals. The charge was "murder." He appeared on the list because of charges made by, or information sup-

## Now, look at the postwar period

plied by, the Yugoslavs. The Austrians themselves investigated him, noting some Nazi ties. Yet none of this was enough to keep him from embarking on a highly visible diplomatic career.

What happened to the war crimes allegation? Why was it apparently not pursued by Yugoslavia, Austria or the United States, which, at the time, was the most important Western occupation power in Austria, with many agents in Vienna?

Was the Waldheim case dropped, as it appears to have been, because of a lack of evidence or discovery of exculpatory documentation? Or was he in fact quietly exonerated? It seems clear in any event that Mr. Waldheim's wartime career was not an object of interest after 1948. But we do not know why.

One question that comes to mind is whether Mr. Waldheim, an important

figure in German Army intelligence at the age of 26, went to work in a higher capacity for the West after the war. He was a multilingual intellectual who had expertise in the evaluation of intelligence from Communists, and these were the years of the Greek civil war and of Tito's courageous break with Stalin. Did he now put his skills to work for the West, with the understanding that the war crimes allegation would be allowed to drift into oblivion?

Mr. Waldheim has spent his postwar years in two centers of intrigue in the East-West struggle. One is Vienna, the other the United Nations. Was this a mere coincidence? Perhaps.

With no one in pursuit, Mr. Waldheim had little to fear. The German records that implicate him in unpleasant activities became available only in the late 1950's and early 1960's, by which time Mr. Waldheim was the rising star in the Austrian diplomatic establishment. And why would any historian care about a young lieutenant whose name might crop up in arcane records? It was not until Mr. Waldheim chose to run for the Austrian presidency that anyone paid any real attention to them.

As Americans, we have a right to know more about Mr. Waldheim's relations with United States authorities after 1945. The Freedom of Information Act may have to be invoked by researchers and journalists. The United Nations has now agreed to make its secret file on Mr. Waldheim available to Israel. But we also need the active cooperation of the Department of Justice, United States Army Intelligence and the Central Intelligence Agency.

The wartime documents that my research uncovered represent a beginning. Now it is time to focus on the more important postwar period. It would be outrageous if we have to wait another 40 years for the full truth to emerge. □